



# The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

## Archives

Spring 2026

### *Florists Botanists and Horticulture Enthusiasts of the House*

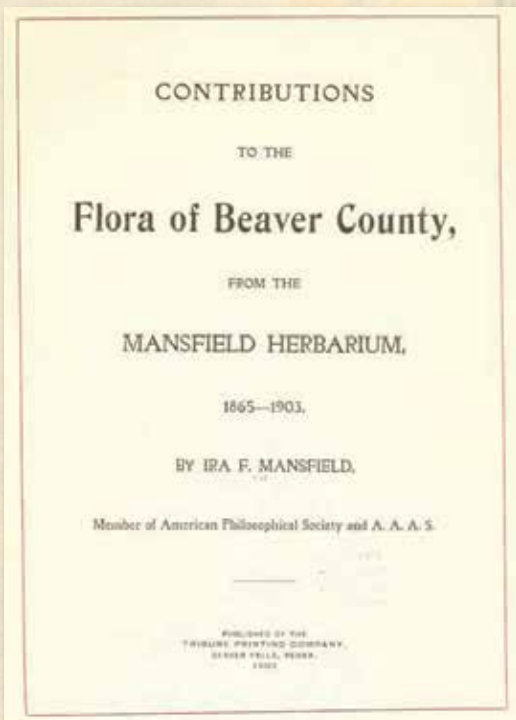
Members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives have often worked in professions such as law, business, or finance before their time in office. However, others arrive in Harrisburg having taken more unexpected career paths. In this issue we are highlighting Members who have taken a special interest in educating people about Pennsylvania's natural plant life, as well as introducing flora from far-away places to new audiences.

#### **Ira F. Mansfield, Beaver County 1881-1882; 1893-1898; 1903-1904**

A native of Ohio, Mansfield served as a captain in the Ohio Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. Following his service, he settled in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, to pursue business opportunities in coal and clay mines. He eventually concentrated on fruit farming and had a large acreage of orchards. An interest in native plants in his surrounding area emerged, and he spent more than 40 years cataloging the flora of Beaver County. He published several works documenting his study of nature, as well as the people that relished life in wild spaces of the Little Beaver Creek watershed.



IRA FRANKLIN MANSFIELD



Left: Mansfield authored this illustrated checklist of native wildflowers of Beaver County. Published in 1903, Mansfield noted that wildflowers were often overlooked by botanists and preservationists. He lamented damage caused by encroaching sawmills, and encouraged readers to get out into nature for themselves to see these flowers in their element.

# Flowers Continued

## Robert W. Carr, Philadelphia, 1820-1821

Carr was born in County Down in Ireland and immigrated to the United States in his youth. He served as a lieutenant colonel in the War of 1812 and later Adjutant General of Pennsylvania from 1821 to 1824.

In 1809, Carr married Ann Bartram. Ann's grandfather, John Bartram, was a renowned botanist who collected plants from across America. He cultivated an international seed and plant trade business which his family continued. Carr, who was already a nature enthusiast, joined her in running Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia.

On June 6, 1829, the Philadelphia Horticultural Society held its first flower show. Carr, who had acquired poinsettia seeds from Joel Roberts Poinsett (the first ambassador to Mexico who brought cuttings of the plant to his greenhouse in South Carolina and shared them with others), exhibited the flower. The flower attracted much attention; however, this native variety of the plant had a short bloom period. Eventually, horticulturalists developed grafting and growing techniques that prolonged the life of the flower. Throughout the 20th century, the poinsettia's bright red flowers have made it a holiday season staple.

Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
Friday, December 12, 2014



### *First Flower Show Held in Philadelphia in 1829*

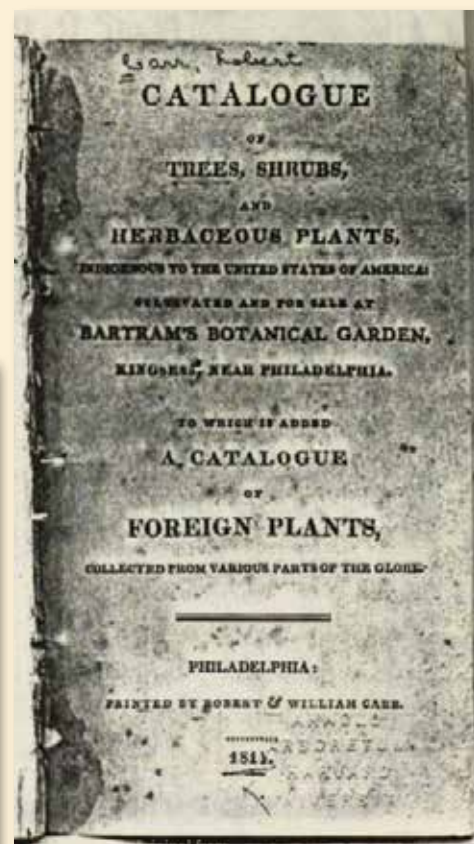
*Account Given in Old Gazette of Original Exhibit Staged by Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in Masonic Hall That Year*

*The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
Sunday, March 24, 1935



This historical marker honoring the Philadelphia Flower Show and noting the introduction of the poinsettia is located on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia.

Right: *Catalogue of trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants, indigenous to the United States of America: cultivated and for sale at Bartram's botanical garden.* Printed by Robert W. and William Carr.



Source:  
<https://www.hathitrust.org/>

# House Divided Over Official State Flower

Concerned that Pennsylvania had not named an official flower, in 1931 the Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed a resolution that created a committee of five House Members tasked with investigating which flower citizens felt best represented the Commonwealth. This task proved not to be an easy one, and competing bills landed on Governor Pinchot's desk naming two different native blooms as the best in the state. Lawmakers were split on naming either the mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) or wild honeysuckle (also known as wild azalea or *azalea nudiflora*) as the top bloom. Proponents of the mountain laurel largely hailed from eastern Pennsylvania, with many from the Poconos region pointing to their annual Laurel Blossom Festival as proof the flower was the best. However, lawmakers from western Pennsylvania championed the delicate wild honeysuckle as the superior choice. According to newspaper reports, Governor Pinchot, who happened to have served as the first head of the United States Forest Service under President Theodore Roosevelt, was just as torn as the lawmakers. He deferred to his wife, Cornelia, and the mountain laurel was enshrined in law as the state flower in 1933.



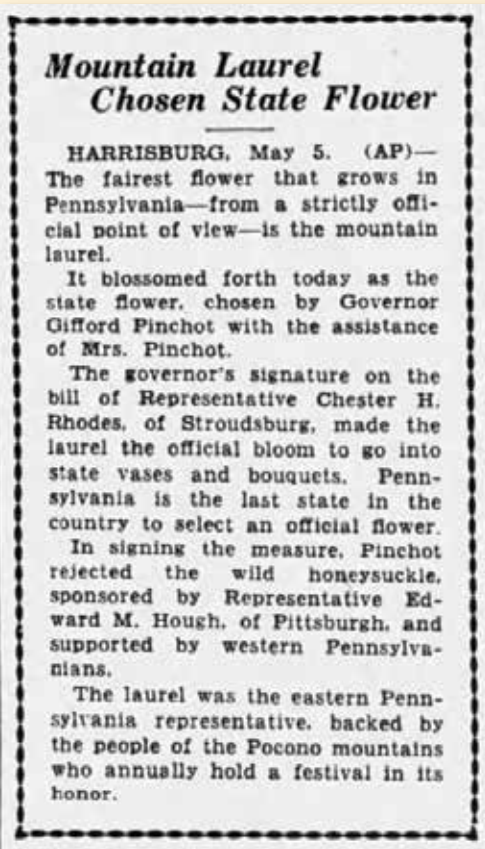
Chester H. Rhodes  
Monroe County, 1923-1928;  
1931-1934

Rhodes, a lawyer and former district attorney of Monroe County, was the prime sponsor of legislation calling for the mountain laurel (right) to be state flower.



Edward M. Hough  
Allegheny County, 1911-1912; 1917-  
1922; 1933-1934

Hough, a brick manufacturer, was the prime sponsor of the opposing legislation favoring wild honeysuckle (below) citing a large bloom range, distinct color, and fragrance as its strengths.



*The Morning Call* (Allentown)  
Saturday, May 6, 1933

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## Memorial Day: House Members Killed in Action

### Ralph E. Kelder, Pike County 1935-1936



Prior to his time in office, Kelder was a long-time employee of the Erie Railroad and served as the postmaster for Matamoras, Pennsylvania for 12 years. He was elected to the House in a Special Election on March 19, 1935, and served one term. During WWII, Kelder served as a captain in the Transportation Corps of the United States Army, serving as the commanding officer of the Railroad Traffic Order. He died September 30, 1943, in England. He is interred at Cambridge American Cemetery in Cambridge, England.



### Walter G. Gryskewicz, Luzerne County 1941-1942



Prior to his House service, Gryskewicz worked as a clerk for the Ashley Borough Council (Luzerne County) and served as mayor of Ashley from 1937 to 1944. He enlisted in the United States Army during WWII, and died as a result of battle on December 5, 1944, in Germany. He is interred at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery and Memorial in Henri-Chapelle, Liege, Belgium.

